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AUTHOR Holly, William J.
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ABSTRACT

This bulletin is devoted to clarifying central issues in the self-esteem debate, with a view to pointing out implications for practice. The relevance of self-esteem to academic achievement is particularly emphasized. The first chapter reviews different meanings that self-esteem has acquired in the context of different theories. Chapter 2 critically examines how self-esteem affects academic achievement by reviewing evidence from educational research and discussing relevant theories. It is concluded that self-esteem is an effect rather than a cause of achievement. Teachers are advised that students need to be led to see for themselves the value of their studies, and the best way to raise students' confidence in their academic ability is to focus directly on developing academic abilities that will justify a sense of confidence. Chapter 3 briefly reviews methods currently being used to raise student self-esteem in two Pennsylvania high schools and three Oregon schools. At these schools, students are clearly given the message that actual self-improvement is the surest route to feeling better about themselves. Chapter 4 details how an Oregon teacher has successfully incorporated self-esteem into a middle school study-skills program. Appended are 14 references and the names of the four persons interiewed in connection with the cited programs. (MLF)

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STUDENT SELF-ESTEEM AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS

William J. Holly

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William J. Holly

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OREGON SCHOOL STUDY COUNCIL
1787 Agate Street
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Preface

Concern with declining student competence in recent years has focused renewed attention on students' self-esteem. Can achievement levels really be raised by increasing students' self-esteem?

This Bulletin first discusses questions of values that have often been ignored. High self-esteem results from achieving (or from recognizing that one has achieved) things that one personally values. It is not something that can be aimed at as a goal in itself. When students see the value of education for themselves, they will have a motive to do their schoolwork beyond wanting to raise their self-esteem. Increased self-esteem then will result naturally from academic success, as opposed to being the goal of academic success.

As this Bulletin reports, these conclusions are reinforced by current research and theory. Academically related self-esteem appears to be an effect rather than a cause of academic achievement. Although high self-esteem can facilitate academic success, it does not in itself cause or provide a motive to achieve anything. And the fact remains that the best way for students to increase their academic self-esteem is for them to acquire academic successes that will justify a sense of self-confidence.

The final chapters of this Bulletin describe practices employed by schools today to enhance student self-esteem. Students are encouraged to accurately assess their personal strengths and weaknesses, to clarify their values and goals, and to acquire knowledge and skills that will justify a sense of personal confidence and competence.

Author William J. Holly received his Ph.D. in Philosophy from the University of California, Irvine, and did his undergraduate work at the University of Oregon.

Philip K. Piele
Executive Secretary

Contents

Preface iii

Introduction 1

1. **What Is Self Esteem?** 3
   - Feeling Superior to Others 3
   - Self-Realization and Self-Perfection 4
   - Self-Image and Self-Acceptance 5
   - Narcissism 6
   - Conclusion 8

2. **Self-Esteem and Academic Achievement** 9
   - Does Self-Esteem Cause Academic Achievement? The Research Says "No" 9
   - Self-Worth Theory 12
   - Locus of Control Theory 13
   - The Hidden Components of Self-Esteem 14
   - Conclusion 16

3. **Self-Esteem as a School Priority** 19
   - Pennsylvania Schools 19
   - Monroe Middle School 20
   - Dale J. Ickes Junior High 21
   - The Positive Action Program at Adams Elementary School 22
   - Conclusion 24

4. **Self-Esteem and Study Skills** 25
   - Increasing Self-Awareness and Self-Understanding 25
   - Accenting the Positive 27
   - Study Skills for Self-Esteem 29
   - Conclusion 30

Conclusion 31
- Values 31
- Psychological Fact and Theory 31
- Practice 32

References 35

Interviews 37

Introduction

> High self-esteem, we have learned, is essential to our development as human beings. The concept is a sine qua non. Without self-esteem, students are susceptible to becoming dropouts, to abusing drugs and alcohol, even to considering suicide. (Editor, *NASSP Bulletin*, 1986)

Over the past twenty-five years, many educators have acted on the belief that promoting student self-esteem should be one of their top priorities. Self-esteem has been seen as the master key both to happiness and academic excellence. What explains this enthusiasm for promoting self-esteem, and to what extent is it justified?

On an intuitive level, the importance of self-esteem seems only to be good common sense. We would not expect students with low opinions of themselves to be very happy or to be very effective in their studies. Conversely, we would not expect students who value themselves highly to contemplate suicide or to destroy themselves with drugs.

These beliefs find a degree of support in educational research. Students with high self-esteem do tend to be happier and more successful. And those with low self-esteem tend to be depressed and less competent.

Nevertheless, the topic of self-esteem has become increasingly controversial in recent years. There are several reasons for this. In the first place, different theories assign different causal roles to self-esteem. High self-esteem can enhance chances of success and low self-esteem can be seen as a cause of failure. But no theory explains how high self-esteem can actually cause or drive a person to greater achievement. The most plausible view, supported by recent research, is that high self-esteem is an effect rather than a cause of achievement.

Adding fuel to the debate, several popular personality theorists maintain that feelings of inferiority provide the primary impetus for further striving. But if this is the case, how do those who already think very well of themselves avoid becoming self-satisfied and complacent?

Some critics have questioned the outcome of programs aimed at raising student self-esteem. Some even blame these programs for having created a generation of unrealistic, incompetent, and unhappy narcissists. Questions about fundamental values and objectives intensify this debate.

Finally, the fact that self-esteem has no standard definition further

complicates the controversy. When people appear to disagree about the value and effects of self-esteem, they may not be talking about the same thing. This makes it difficult to meaningfully compare and evaluate studies.

Self-esteem is a fascinating and challenging topic. The issues are deep and serious. It is important to know what role, if any, self-esteem plays in the development of academic and social skills. If the promotion of high self-esteem is indeed useful, it is important to know how best to do it and what possible pitfalls to avoid.

This Bulletin is devoted to clarifying central issues in the self-esteem debate, with a view to pointing out implications for practice. The relevance of self-esteem to academic achievement is particulary emphasized.

Chapter 1 reviews different meanings that self-esteem has acquired in the context of different theories and discusses fundamental questions of values that are entailed. How and why self-esteem is thought to be related to academic achievement is explained in chapter 2. Chapter 3 describes methods currently used by schools to promote student self-esteem as a general priority. How one teacher has successfully incorporated self-esteem into a middle school study-skills program is detailed in chapter 4.

It is impossible not to be impressed by the enthusiasm generated by programs for enhancing student self-esteem. I hope this Bulletin will provide a clearer understanding of what these programs do and why they inspire such enthusiasm.

Chapter 1

What Is Self Esteem?

At first glace, self-esteem is a perfectly ordinary and self-explanatory concept. To have high self-esteem is simply to esteem or to value oneself. It is referred to variously as having a positive self-image, a positive self-concept, or a feeling of self-worth. Sometimes it is described as feeling good about oneself or as feeling worthwhile as a human being.

Conversely, to have low self-esteem is to feel worthless, good-for-nothing, a failure, or defective or deficient in some important way. This can be reflected in feeling that one is stupid, ugly, incompetent, unlikable, untrustworthy, and so forth.

While the general idea behind self-esteem is clear, the term has no standard definition. Its meaning can vary, depending on the context in which it is used, theories one has about it, and the particular values one holds. This ambiguity often needlessly confuses discussions.

This chapter reviews some of the different meanings that self-esteem has acquired in the context of different theories. It also explains how self-esteem can seem either a good thing or a bad thing to have or to seek, depending on how it is defined and what values and theories one holds.

Feeling Superior to Others

William James is credited with being the first to have used the term *self-esteem*. He believed that we have self-seeking tendencies and that the experience of failure promotes renewed efforts at achievement. A person will feel successful and have self-esteem to the extent that he or she achieves in proportion to his aspirations. But James held that the drive for self-esteem is more than a drive for mere self-enhancement. He believed that self-esteem depends at least in part on social comparisons and on how one thinks one is viewed by others.

Alfred Adler and Abraham Maslow held similar views. Adler originally believed that people are motivated primarily by a desire for superiority and

power over others. He was impressed by the fact that many people are driven to compensate for defects or feelings of inferiority: Stutterers become orators, weaklings become body-builders, and dull children strive for intellectual attainments in an attempt to feel powerful and superior to others. Maslow concurred in defining self-esteem as feeling superior to others and considered it to be the second highest human need.

There are two things worthy of attention in these "drive" theories. First, they do not support the view that high self-esteem is a cause of achievement. To the contrary, they maintain that feelings of inferiority, of falling short, are the primary goads to further striving. The need to compensate for feelings of inferiority and gain more self-esteem motivates people to outstanding effort and achievement.

The second thing to notice is that the desire for power or superiority over others does not seem a tendency that society should be eager to promote without reservation. Although a feeling of inferiority and a need to prove oneself can indeed drive some to achieve out of proportion to their abilities, these same feelings can lead some to bitterness, frustration, antisocial behavior, apathy, and resignation.

Furthermore, an emphasis on superiority over others tends to pit individuals against their fellow human beings. It emphasizes competition and comparison with others over social cooperation and the quest for excellence for its own sake.

In sum, feeling superior to others does not seem to be the best motive available for achievement and self-improvement. Accordingly, most advocates of self-esteem today do not define it in terms of feeling superior to others. They discourage social comparisons and they demand respect for the worth and rights of others.

Self-Realization and Self-Perfection

Adler eventually renounced the view that the will to power is the basic human drive. He came to believe that most people are not solely self-interested but also are socially oriented and that the basic life force is the quest for perfection. Similarly, Maslow taught that the highest human need is for personal development or self-realization.

When clinical psychologists encourage self-realization and the quest for perfection, they seem to speak to the highest in us. Surely, it is worthy to try to be the best that we can be, to aim at realizing our ultimate potential. As John Stuart Mill once wrote, of all the works of man, surely the most noble is man himself. Granting the worthiness of self-improvement, however, a few reservations are in order.

Making self-esteem or self-perfection the primary aim of life seems to place undue emphasis on the self. It puts the value-cart before the horse. The best way to attain self-esteem is to forget about self-esteem as a goal in itself

and to concentrate on doing things that are worthwhile in themselves. We see this clearly in the lives of those we most admire.

For example, Einstein was driven by a desire to understand and explain the mysteries of nature, not by a desire to enhance his self-esteem. Van Gogh was driven by a vision of beauty he wanted to share with the world. Florence Nightengale and Martin Luther King were motivated by a love of people and a belief in their cause, not by a desire to feel superior. These people wanted to improve the world in which they lived. Theirs was a desire to be the best that they could be in the service of those things they considered most worthwhile. What drove them was a confidence in and commitment to the value of what they were trying to accomplish.

Of course, these people probably felt better about themselves for having spent their lives in worthwhile pursuits. But their goal was to invest their time in the things they felt were most worthwhile, not to feel good about themselves for having done them. We would think the less of them if we learned that their primary goal in life had been to enhance their own self-esteem, not to advance human knowledge, culture, or happiness. Finally, there is the point that doing a thing cannot make us feel proud unless we see a value in it that is independent of its ability to make us feel proud.

The moral for teaching self-esteem is that perhaps we should forget about self-esteem as a goal and simply aim at doing those things that are most worthwhile. This would appear to be the most direct route to a genuine sense of self-esteem. Some would argue that the opportunity to acquire a high level of self-esteem is only available to those students who know the true value of things—who know what is most worth acquiring and doing.

Students, then, need to be able to recognize, and sometimes question, the value of what they are asked to learn and do. If they see the value of the thing itself, they already will have a motive to acquire it, and should not need the additional motive of enhancing their self-esteem to acquire it.

If students find that the material to be learned is interesting, that in itself will serve as an incentive and they may consider themselves more interesting for having learned it. If they understand why various historical figures rightly have been admired, they will have reasons for emulating them beyond wanting to be admired themselves.

Students who understand that knowledge and skills will open up opportunities for them will be more motivated to learn new things and will feel more competent for having met academic challenges. The students who know the value and joy of learning are the ones in whom we place our greatest hopes.

Self-Image and Self-Acceptance

Karen Horney and Carl Rogers distinguish between a person's self-image or self-concept and self-acceptance. A person's self-image is how he or she

pictures himself, what he thinks his character, abilities, and other attributes are. Self-acceptance, on the other hand, reflects a person's values and the feelings about himself as represented in his self-image.

Horney and Rogers believe that two things are essential to psychological well-being: an accurate self-image and a healthy amount of self-acceptance. Denial or rejection of what one is really like can lead to internal conflict, pain, and harmful defensive behavior. Recognition and acceptance of one's true desires, abilities, competencies, and attributes are considered the key to achieving greater self-realization and self-actualization.

The first part of this theory seems obvious. Surely people are more likely to succeed when they clearly and accurately perceive what they really want and what their assets, abilities, and liabilities are. Self-deception, confusion, and error are not conducive either to happiness or to success.

The part about self-acceptance is less obvious. It is irrational and a waste of emotional energy to feel bad about unchangeable personal limitations. And, in areas where one indeed can improve, it is better to concentrate on and to feel positive about one's efforts to improve than to lament one's shortcomings. Self-acceptance of this type is more productive than self-flagellation. Still, we do not want students to use self-acceptance to excuse their behavior. Saying "Well, that's just how I am" in reference to faults that can and should be corrected is irresponsible.

We want students to care deeply about whether they are kind, considerate, competent, honest, and so forth. Unfortunately, caring entails that a person will experience pain at recognizing his or her faults and failures. We cannot and should not hope or even desire to protect students from all painful experiences. What they can do, though, is to teach them how to deal constructively with personal shortcomings. We can help them to accept themselves as fallible human beings who, while always falling short of perfection, should be esteemed for striving to learn and grow both personally and academically. This indeed is one aspect of self-esteem that is commonly encouraged in schools today.

Narcissism

Narcissists are selfish, self-centered people who have inflated and unrealistically high opinions of themselves. Narcissism is rooted in a false self-image, not an exaggerated or excessive sense of self-esteem. The reflection that narcissists see when they look at themselves is a distorted image. They have esteem not for who they really are, but for who they think they are.

Proponents of self-esteem certainly do not wish to encourage these traits in their students. Nevertheless, when esteem-enhancement programs are given such titles as "Super Me," parents may worry that their children will become egotistical, unrealistic, self-centered, and immune to constructive criticism.

Barbara Lerner (1985) believes parents' concerns are justified.

Lerner argues that self-esteem programs in the schools have not resulted either in greater happiness or in greater learning. In the 1950s, before these programs were developed, the academic competence of American children equaled or exceeded that of other nations. In the 1960s and 1970s, however, student competence dropped markedly in all grades except K through 4. Neither were students happier, says Lerner, citing such things as increased drug use and suicide attempts among teenagers. In fact, she says, narcissism and grandiosity have replaced neuroticism as the primary concern among clinical therapists.

It is perhaps simplistic for Lerner to place the entire blame for current social problems on ineffective self-esteem programs. The popularity of these programs may have been a reflection of the troubled times, a demoralizing war, and the decline of traditional values that historically accompanies affluence and disillusionment with material success. Still, Lerner makes worthwhile points.

Lerner is not opposed to self-esteem per se. She is against what she refers to as feel-good-now self-esteem which is different from earned self-esteem. The dominant feel-good-now theory is that children have a fragile self-esteem and that high self-esteem is the master key to learning and happiness. So teachers have been taught to protect children's esteem from injury at all costs, to give each child unconditional acceptance and praise, and to protect children from experiencing failure.

Students who don't even try may receive more praise than those who do risk stretching, growing, and reaching for excellence. Lerner thinks this has shifted the emphasis from academic excellence to simply feeling worthwhile as a human being. And it has created a generation of incompetent, narcissistic, ego-inflated dreamers who have been trained to expect immediate gratification without effort.

As an antidote to this, Lerner recommends a return to the views of Alfred Binet and Sigmund Freud. Binet held that children are egotists by nature and that they must be taught self-criticism to be able to maximize their intellectual development. They must be taught to critically monitor their own performance, appraise it, and look for ways to improve it. Self-criticism, not self-esteem, is the key to intellectual development.

Freud added that happiness as an adult requires acceptance of the reality principle. The infantile desire for immediate gratification must be replaced with the realization that future happiness sometimes requires hard work and sacrifice in the present. The willingness and ability to delay gratification is a sign of emotional maturity.

Theodore Chandler (1985) makes similar points. He believes that undue emphasis on self-esteem can make us forget that academic success depends to a large extent upon ability, skill development, preparatory study, and perhaps even a little pretest anxiety. Too much confidence can lead to complacency, while a lack of confidence can sometimes motivate us to grow and change.

Finally, he agrees that if a positive self-image is to serve students well, it must be earned and must stem from a rational and accurate belief system.

Lerner and Chandler, then, do not dispute the value of healthy self-esteem. Their only concern is that self-esteem needs to be firmly grounded in competencies and achievements worthy of esteem. It should be based on a realistic assessment of one's self and one's abilities and of what is needed to succeed in life. And it should involve accepting responsibility and recognizing the worth and rights of others.

Conclusion

A misunderstanding of what is meant by self-esteem is responsible for some of the criticism that programs for improving students' self-esteem have received. Self-esteem today is not meant to imply being conceited or feeling superior to others. Nor is it to be confused with narcissism or grandiosity. Educators today encourage respect for the worth and value of others along with respect for self. They discourage competition and comparison with others. And they stress the importance of having an accurate and realistic self-image.

Although it is possible for feelings of inferiority to result in frantic striving and extraordinary achievement, feeling negative about oneself also can be depressing and debilitating and can lead to destructive behavior and attitudes. Students should fare better both academically and socially if they have a realistic self-image, a sense of personal worth, and a confidence in their own abilities.

Finally, it should be emphasized that the primary aim of education is not to promote self-esteem. The central concern of schools is to help students excell in the pursuit of those things most worth doing. Students who internalize the best values of our culture will be worthy of esteem, not because they aim at acquiring self-esteem for themselves, but because they value and pursue those things most worth doing and being.

Chapter 2

Self-Esteem and Academic Achievement

Most research indicates a moderate correlation between how much self-esteem students have and how well they do academically. Low self-esteem in particular appears to be associated with low achievement. Thus some educators have hoped to improve academic achievement by first trying to raise students' self-esteem. Increased self-esteem is viewed, in part, as a means to an end—the end being higher academic performance. This chapter critically examines how self-esteem affects academic achievement, first by reviewing evidence from educational research, then by discussing relevant theories.

There is ample reason to believe that high self-esteem can indeed contribute to students' academic success. But this needs to be reconciled with the truth that high self-esteem does not and cannot cause or motivate students to achieve. If anything, self-esteem appears to be an effect rather than a cause of achievement.

This is the paradox of self-esteem. If self-esteem is never a cause of achievement (but instead a result of achievement), how is it possible for self-esteem to contribute to one's chances for academic success? The key to solving this paradox lies in understanding two things.

First, one component of self-esteem that obviously increases students' chances of academic success is self-confidence or a belief in their ability to succeed. But the fact remains that self-confidence is often built on prior success.

Second, although self-confidence can indeed contribute to one's chances of success, it does not in itself provide a motive to do anything. It only allows one to feel safe trying new things. And, again, the best way to acquire a justified sense of confidence is to actually develop competencies.

Does Self-Esteem Cause Academic Achievement? The Research Says "No"

In the first major review of self-esteem research, Ruth Wylie (1974) stressed that our so-called common-sense beliefs about self-esteem are not

obvious truths that can be validated by appeal to personal experience. They are assertions from a complex, inadequately explored, controversial, and often methodologically flawed area of psychology.

Contradictory Results

The severity of Wylie's remarks reflect some frustration. Attempts to validate common-sense beliefs about self-esteem have generated an array of contradictory results. As L. Edward Wells and Gerald Marwell (1976) note, studies can be cited to support almost any belief that has ever been held, pro or con, about self-esteem. Some studies find positive correlations between self-esteem and social competence, competitiveness, achievement motivation, and ability to accept unflattering self-descriptions. Others find negligible or even negative correlations. A further problem is that mere statistical correlations do not establish causal relationships.

Although some of the trouble may be due to lack of methodological rigor, Wylie believes two other factors are largely to blame. First, there is no standard definition of self-esteem. Several different instruments have been used to measure self-esteem, with little information available about reliability or construct validity. Different investigators use different or inadequate definitions of what they think they are measuring, and of what are the dependent and independent variables and what are mere correlates. This makes meaningful comparison of findings difficult if not impossible.

Second, more clear and complete theories are needed. Operational definitions in the absence of theory will not provide a very satisfactory body of knowledge. Even if findings clearly indicated that self-esteem precedes achievement, this would not allow us to conclude that it *causes* achievement if we have no theory that explains how it functions as a cause.

Taking these criticisms to heart, subsequent investigators have achieved results that, while still tentative, appear to be more reliable. On the whole, these more reliable studies indicate that self-esteem is more likely to be an effect than a cause of academic achievement.

Success Causes Self-Esteem

Mary Ann Scheirer and Robert E. Kraut (1979) reviewed studies of a large number of self-esteem enhancement programs aimed at raising academic success; all the studies incorporated standard criteria for sound experimental design. Some evidence indicated that working with parents to raise student self-esteem could be helpful. But the effects were not long-lasting, and it remains possible that the increase in self-esteem resulted from achievement followed by parental or social approval.

Many of the programs did succeed in raising either self-esteem or achievement separately, but seldom were both raised by the same program! When they were, it appeared that success was a cause, not an effect, of increased self-esteem. This was confirmed by cross-lag correlational studies that compare increases in self-esteem and achievement over time to determine

which might be the cause of the other.

Two of the studies cited by Scheirer and Kraut are of particular interest. One research effort compared highly structured basic skills programs with the open school approach that stresses self-esteem as a prerequisite to learning. The basic skills approach was found to be more effective both in raising self-esteem and in raising achievement levels.

The second study examined a fifteen-year program to reduce delinquency by raising self-esteem. Self-esteem, achievement, and delinquency were found to be unchanged by the program.. The most sobering aspect of this study, however, was the response of program participants. Despite the objectively measured failure of the program, the instructors and delinquents overwhelmingly favored the program and thought that it was working fine. The moral is that participants' enthusiasm for a program is not a reliable measure of a program's effectiveness.

Scheirer and Kraut concluded that the evidence for a causal relationship between self-concept and academic achievement was overwhelmingly negative. Consequently, they advise educators not to assume that enhancing students' feelings about themselves will increase academic achievement.

Ability Is the Key

Jerald Bachman and Patrick O'Malley (1986) came to similar conclusions. Using sophisticated mathematical tools to discover possible causal relationships, they examined whether self-esteem is affected by students' comparisons of their own abilities with those of their classmates. School climate and comparison with classmates, they found, had little impact either on students' self-esteem or on their achievement.

Actual ability appears to be the primary determinant both of students' achievement and of their self-concept of their ability, though students do tend to overestimate their ability. Bachman and O'Mally concluded that "the dimension that really matters for long-range educational attainment is actual ability, not self-concept. So, if we want students to do better academically. . . help them maximize the use of their aptitudes and thus actually raise their abilities. For what it is worth, that also would raise their self-concepts."

Using cross-lag correlations, Sheila Pottebaum, Timothy Keith, and Stewart Ehly (1986) examined data on 58,728 high school students to determine the possible causal relationship between self-concept and academic achievement. Their tentative results, "suggesting no causal relationship between general self-concept and achievement, are consistent with much of the well-done research in this area." They conclude that "educators should not focus on the development of general self-concept as a means by which to improve academic achievement."

In conclusion, the most recent and reliable studies strongly indicate that self-esteem does not cause achievement. In the face of so much feeling to the contrary, it is difficult to accept this conclusion. Accordingly, the following

three sections attempt to explain these counterintuitive results in the light of relevant theory.

Self-Worth Theory

Some theorists claim that self-esteem in itself does not cause students to do anything at all. Rather, what motivates students to achieve is the desire to preserve the self-esteem they already possess and to acquire more. Martin Covington (1984), for example, holds that students have a need to promote and protect their feelings of self-worth.

Is Effort or Ability the Best Measure of Self-Worth?

Covington's research shows that young children measure their worth primarily in terms of effort, whereas older children tend to measure their worth in terms of ability. Ability, older children reason, is the primary determinant of success. Covington believes that this explains the "no-effort" strategy that older students often employ. Realizing that failure indicates lack of ability, they withhold effort to avoid failure that could threaten their feelings of self-worth. To defuse this destructive strategy, Covington recommends using cooperative learning and mastery learning to emphasize the value of effort and cooperation over ability.

In mastery learning, students are allowed the time they need to attain a level of competence or mastery. Mark Grabe (1985) finds that mastery learning does indeed diminish the perceived importance of ability relative to effort. When students are allowed to experience genuine success, they come to think of their life experiences as being under their own control. Moreover, those who expend effort attribute their success more to ability than to effort, in contrast to less persistent students.

Several aspects of the self-worth theory are relevant to the question whether feelings of self-worth cause achievement. First, the advice given by Covington and Grabe suggests the reverse: achievement is the cause of self-confidence and self-esteem. The point of mastery learning is to let students actually experience success so that they can feel more competent. Given that the most rational basis for feeling competent is actually having achieved competence, this practice makes good sense.

Second, self-worth theory is a "drive-model" concept; that is, it holds that low levels of self-esteem are what drive people to greater achievement. In this view, those who already have high levels of self-esteem actually have less reason to achieve.

Covington's theory implies, then, that while we might occasionally allow students a taste of self-esteem to whet their appetites, we should not let them have too much of it. Keep them esteem-hungry and stress that enterprise, not ability, leads to the prize. Drive home that outstanding success requires dedication and heroic effort, even for the most talented. "Genius is 1 percent

inspiration, 99 percent perspiration." Borrowing from B.F. Skinner, we might even make esteem-reinforcements irregular and unpredictable to increase student persistence.

Motivation to Achieve

To the extent that self-worth theory is plausible, it explains why self-esteem has not been found to precede and cause achievement. Feelings of inferiority, not feelings of superiority, are the postulated incentives for further striving. Students with a strong sense of self-worth should be expected to become complacent. But this is simplistic.

Feelings of worthlessness can indeed drive some to heroic efforts to improve themselves. But wanting to acquire more self-esteem is not the only thing that can motivate a person to achieve. Even people with an abundance of self-esteem can be strongly motivated to achieve. They can be motivated by the perceived value of what they want to achieve.

On the other hand, there are many reasons students can have for not trying, reasons that may not be related to their levels of self-esteem. They may be in rebellion, bored, worried about family problems, or simply not see the value of the assignment. Furthermore, if students believe that they lack the ability to succeed, it doesn't make much sense for them to try, questions of self-esteem aside.

When low self-esteem is based on feeling incompetent, we see how higher self-esteem can enhance achievement effort. Students who are confident in their ability will not fear that effort will lead to humiliating failure. Even here, however, confidence that one can succeed does not in itself provide a motive to act. Confidence only makes it feel safe and reasonable to try if one cares to. Fortunately, as we have seen, motives to achieve are available even to those who already feel very good about themselves.

In conclusion, the finding that self-esteem does not cause or even always precede achievement is explained consistently with self-worth theory in the following way: First, low feelings of self-worth themselves can precede and even provide a strong incentive for achievement. Second, self-confidence is most likely to be solid in those who already have demonstrated ability through prior achievement.

Finally, those who have high self-esteem may feel more safe in trying to achieve further goals, but they may lack a motive to do so. High self-esteem, then, is not a necessary precondition for striving, nor is it what motivates anyone to achieve anything.

Locus of Control Theory

Several "locus of control" studies cited by Philip Gammage (1985) indicate that internally oriented children achieve more and are more socially competent than children who have an external locus of control. Internalizers feel in control of their own lives, and consequently they accept responsibility

and credit for their actions, blaming others less. They act from their own values for their own purposes.

Jerry Conrath (1986) has used locus of control theory to help students who are discouraged or feel they have been defeated. Students with an external locus of control usually feel impotent, helpless, and worthless. Second, they often distrust adults, adult institutions, and authority in general, and blame others for their failures. Finally, they see no relationship between their effort and achievements.

Conrath makes two main suggestions for turning externalizers into internalizers. First, he believes, self-confidence and a sense of control over one's life will develop with success in skill development and learning. Consequently, teachers should help students set meaningful, attainable goals. When these goals are achieved teachers can help students see the relationship between their effort and their achievement and demand that they take credit and feel pride. Seeing that they have some control over their environment, students will be apt to assume more responsibility for their own actions.

Second, Conrath says students need to understand why education is important. Teachers should clarify the purpose, value, utility, and relevance of what students are asked to learn and do. Providing external rewards such as money, trinkets, and high grades is not the answer. These external reasons for doing schoolwork may actually retard learning. Instead, Conrath suggests giving students the real, adult reasons for learning.

Conrath insists that the authoritarian teacher who refuses to discuss the rationale for assignments reinforces the student's view that the world is ordered by other people's values. This is contrary to one of the greater purposes of education—to teach our young to be participants in, not simply spectators of, their culture. Hence students must be encouraged to internalize the best values of their culture.

In conclusion, Conrath stresses two very different dimensions of self-esteem. First, it is important to have confidence in one's ability, competence, and a sense of control. Second, it is important to have confidence in one's values, because confidence in and commitment to the value of what one is doing increases the intensity and duration of effort.

Neither of these conclusions, however, supports the view that self-esteem causes academic achievement. Again, confidence in one's ability to succeed academically does not in itself provide a motive to achieve academically. And, in line with recent research, Conrath suggests that confidence in ability is most easily enhanced by actually having meaningful successes.

The Hidden Components of Self-Esteem

Studies that investigate the causal relation between achievement and self-esteem usually are concerned with what is known as *global self-esteem*: how positive a person feels about himself or herself in general. It is measured by

responses to such statements as "I have much to be proud of" and "I feel pretty worthless."

It is commonly believed that feeling good about oneself as opposed to feeling worthless can enhance people's chances of academic and social success. Those who feel worthless and incompetent can become discouraged and defensive, unable to accept constructive criticism. Research shows that those with low self-esteem tend to be more depressed, and depression can be debilitating. Low self-esteem also can lessen one's social attractiveness.

Although it is reasonable to believe that low self-esteem can make a person less effective and less attractive, there is much less reason to believe that high self-esteem necessarily contributes to academic success. Simply knowing that a student has high global self-esteem tells us very little about that student. It tells us neither how she rates herself objectively with respect to various personal attributes and abilities, nor what she values or how she feels about her self-ratings.

The Many Facets of Self-Worth

There are many different aspects of the self to feel good or bad about. First, there are inherited endowments over which one has little or no control, and for which praise and blame consequently are not appropriate. These include physical and mental assets or handicaps, race, sex, and social standing. Second, there are achievements, possessions, and successes and failures in various roles (student, athlete, lawyer, parent, spouse, and so forth). Third, many find a large part of their personal worth in character or in intellectual prowess or moral virtue.

Fourth, perceiving themselves as likable and loveable is more important to some people than to others. Recent studies indicate that merely showing interest in students, merely asking them about themselves, can raise their self-esteem.

Finally, it is possible to feel worthwhile simply by virtue of being a human being and believing that every person is unique, precious, and worthy of respect in his or her own way.

Several people may rate themselves identically in all these areas and yet have varying levels of self-esteem because they have different values. For example, some may attach greater importance to being likeable or loveable, while others value achievement above other qualities. Consequently, a student who knows that she is very able and smart still might have low self-esteem, because she perceives failure in another dimension such as virtue or popularity. Some students, moreover, are able to maintain high self-esteem even while acknowledging their academic incompetence, because they do not care about academic success.

What Do Students Value?

Ann Juhasz (1985) asked seventh and eighth graders what makes them feel good about themselves. Among the responses were clothes, pets, being

honest, being healthy, having sex, and having a high standard of living. Self-esteem that rests upon having sex or nice clothes may be tied indirectly at best to motives to do well academically and thus may be a poor indicator of future academic success. Since academic success is not the only area in which students can find their personal worth, high self-esteem need not indicate either academic ability, success, or concern.

Because self-esteem rests on a multitude of factors that are not always related to academics, the relevance of self-esteem to academic performance can vary from student to student. To diagnose a student's academic problems, then, we need to know more than his or her general level of self-esteem. We need to know the particulars that enter into that self-esteem. How does the student rate himself or herself in each specific area, and what importance does he attach to each?

If a student's low self-esteem results from feeling that no one cares about him, this may hinder his work by causing depression or recalcitrance. Support groups or consultation with parents may be indicated in this case. On the other hand, if his low self-esteem stems from feelings of incompetence, the obvious remedy is to help him raise his level of competence.

Finally, when students do value academic pursuits and have self-confidence, neither self-esteem nor self-confidence is what motivates or causes them to do their work. Either they are motivated by indirect rewards such as grades or parental approval, or they are driven by a commitment to the worth and value of the work they are doing. Self-esteem is a byproduct of doing things that are regarded as being worthwhile in themselves. It is not the main reason for engaging in those activities.

Conclusion

Student self-esteem is based on a multitude of factors (abilities, attributes, and values) that may or may not be related to academic achievement. Furthermore, different individuals react differently to high or low feelings of self-worth. So it should not surprise us that statistical studies show no universal correlation between levels of self-esteem and academic achievement.

High self-esteem can free some students to be more productive and open to constructive suggestion, whereas it can lead others to become self-satisfied, complacent, and immune to criticism. On the other hand, low self-esteem causes some to become depressed and despondent, whereas others react with frantic striving and heroic efforts to improve themselves and compensate for the perceived inferiority. In short, a person's level of self-esteem never completely determines how he or she will react in any situation.

Does high self-esteem ever cause academic achievement? Recent studies indicate that it does not. If anything, self-esteem appears to be caused by prior achievement. This conclusion is reinforced by theory in two ways.

First, because school is such a significant part of children's lives, it is only

natural that prior academic success or failure will have a significant impact on how they feel about themselves. Moreover, prior academic success provides a sound basis for students to feel academically competent.

Second, although some theories provide a plausible explanation for how low self-esteem may movtivate students to achieve academically, no theory explains how high self-esteem can provide a motive to do anything in particular. Feeling good about oneself, or feeling competent and able, does not in itself provide a motive to achieve anything at all.

This is not to deny that low self-esteem can hinder academic progress. In fact, it can hinder progress in two ways. First, feeling worthless and incompetent can be depressing and demoralizing. Second, a student's confidence in and commitment to his or her own values can increase persistence and effort. But this will contribute to academic success only when students directly or indirectly value academic pursuits.

It seems possible that self-esteem or learned self-confidence can contribute to a person's confidence in her own values. But her high self-esteem still will not be her motive for pursuing the things she values. Her motive for achievement will be the value she sees in the things she wants to achieve.

What are the practical implications for those who have believed that student self-esteem is the key to academic excellence? The answer is twofold: First, students need to be led to see for themselves the value of their studies. The best and most direct motive for doing things that are worthwhile consists in understanding what really makes them worthwhile. Second, the best way to raise students' confidence in their academic ability is to focus directly on developing academic abilities that will justify a sense of confidence.

These conclusions complement those of the first chapter: The most direct and reliable route to a self-esteem worth having is to forget about self-esteem as a goal, and to concentrate on becoming the best that one can be in the pursuit of those things most worth doing.

Chapter 3

Self-Esteem as a School Priority

Many schools have made the enhancement of student self-esteem a top priority. This chapter briefly reviews and explains methods currently being used to raise student self-esteem.

Pennsylvania Schools

In 1973, the Pennsylvania State Board of Education instituted a program to assess its schools on the attainment of twelve major goals, one of which was the enhancement of student self-esteem. Steven C. Sarokon (1986) interviewed administrators, teachers, and students at two Pennsylvania high schools that had made the greatest gains in student self-esteem, and two that had suffered the greatest losses. His recommendations, based on the most important factors related to self-esteem, are as follows:

1. Administrators should establish the improvement of student self-esteem as a school priority. Positive staff attitudes are important. Train teachers to deal with students in positive ways. And use faculty meetings to identify factors in the school environment that contribute to or detract most from student self-esteem.
2. Use group meetings to improve communications among students, teachers, and administrators. Listen to students' suggestions for improving the school, and use their suggestions and help. This raises their self-esteem by giving them recognition, respect, and responsibility.
3. Establish an award system to recognize the accomplishments of all students in all areas of school life. Use assemblies, announcements, bulletin boards, and outdoor school signs to display and recognize their work. Also, community booster clubs can honor students in music, drama, and athletics.
4. Consistently successful athletic teams and positive player-coach relationships appear to bolster student self-esteem. Also useful are

increased student participation in drama and musical productions and teacher interest in extramural activities.

Among factors that can negatively affect self-esteem of students, Sarokon cites drug and alcohol abuse, negative student and teacher attitudes after a long strike, and the difficult transition from student-oriented middle schools to subject-matter-related high schools.

Sarokon mentions that self-esteem is seen as an important variable in the academic and personal success of students and that it is also a valued educational outcome in its own right. He does not say, however, whether the schools in his study experienced higher or lower academic success following increases or decreases in levels of student self-esteem.

Monroe Middle School

Jim Slemp, principal of Monroe Middle School in Eugene, Oregon, considers student self-esteem to be his school's top priority. When asked whether student self-esteem raises academic performance, he replied that academics is a way to raise self-esteem, too.

When pressed about whether self-esteem is a cause or an effect of achievement, Slemp laughingly asked, "Which comes first—the chicken or the egg?" He believes that the causal relationship is reciprocal.

How does Monroe Middle School's priority on self-esteem translate into action? Slemp underlines school climate. School effectiveness research shows that "kids don't learn from people they don't like in places they don't like." So teachers at Monroe work hard to build positive feelings and relationships with students and parents. To ensure continuity, every child has the same homeroom guide for all three years at Monroe. The homeroom guide helps students set individual goals and monitors progress.

In addition to displaying student work, Monroe has a recognition program to honor students for their achievements. Every student gets recognized at least once a year for something. Academic contests are held so that outstanding academic effort and accomplishment gets recognized, too. Awards are given for participation in an activities program.

Monroe Middle School's goal is to help every student to succeed in his or her own way, both as a person and as a learner. Students are graded for personal growth, not relative to other students. At the same time, discipline is consistent, and children are given responsibilities. A service program promotes student responsibility and involvement with the community.

The emphasis on building student self-esteem, then, appears to have two basic parts. First, students know that their teachers like them, care about them, and are interested in them as persons. Second, students are recognized and rewarded for their effort, growth, and accomplishments in academics, the arts, athletics, and social service. This latter method is founded on the belief that student self-esteem will grow when achievements are followed by public

recognition and reward. And Monroe students are aware of what behavior is rewarded.

Dale J. Ickes Junior High

At the entrance to Dale J. Ickes Junior High in Milwaukie, Oregon, is a large poster entitled, "Why Dale Ickes Jr. High is a great place to be." A picture of a big, green Martian is surrounded by little flying saucers on which students and parents have written what they most appreciate about the school. This is only one way in which this school focuses on the positive.

Nancy Hersey is a counselor at Dale Ickes who believes that every child is special and unique. The school's role is to help students to discover what they are good at and what their talents, skills, and special gifts are, then help develop them.

Especially when working with kids in trouble, it is important to find what has worked for them in the past, look for the positive, and help them develop what they have going for them. "People who experience success are not the ones who leave us. The common denominator for dropouts is that they are not very good at anything," Hersey says.

Her advice to students is: "Find out what you are good at and how fun it is, and maybe you won't drop out of school." She wants them to value life. She wants them to be successes, people who can look into a mirror and say, "I like myself. I like what I do, and I am good at it. I like knowing that I am using my talents, knowing that I have done the best that I know how."

Although this advice reads like a recipe for acquiring self-esteem, the emphasis is not on attaining passive feelings of self-worth. Rather, the focus at Dale Ickes Junior High is on being fully alive, active, and involved; students are encouraged to pursue their talents to the utmost, win and succeed at the things they do best.

To foster pride in student work, projects from art, shop, and home economics classes are prominently displayed in the hallways. Pictures of outstanding students in math, shop, and other classes are posted on bulletin boards. During assemblies, students are recognized for their achievements. And every home room has a chart that lists the achievements of each student.

Hersey adds that there are other ways to help students feel better about themselves. One thing she stresses is helping students learn to express their feelings clearly. It is especially important to be able to express feelings to those you feel close to. "If you are able to communicate effectively, it makes you feel better. No one likes to be misunderstood."

Why is being understood so important? According to Hersey, love is a matter of respecting other people's opinions and feelings, even when we may not agree with them. How can we feel loved if others do not even know or recognize what we really think and feel?

Hersey is a great believer in "TLC"—tender, loving, care. Students with

special problems or needs meet in small groups in her office each week to practice communicating effectively, expressing their feelings, seeing the positive in themselves and in others, and providing mutual support. "You can grow and develop better if you feel loved, secure, and part of a group," she says.

Of special pride to Hersey is her group of "student specialists"—student leaders she has selected and trained to help students who are having problems in school. These specialists also learn by being role models for others. And when popular students befriend the disadvantaged, they use their influence to bring them back into the group.

Hersey has written a pamphlet called "How to Be a Winner Here at Dale J. Ickes Junior High School." It covers manners, responsibility, and study skills and is wonderfully illustrated by Hersey's daughter.

The Positive Action Program at Adams Elementary School

Students in grades K through 5 at Adams Elementary School in Corvallis, Oregon, work fifteen to twenty minutes every morning on self-esteem. The "Positive Action" program used at Adams is one developed by Carol Allred of Twin Falls, Idaho, who received a commission from the governor of that state to develop materials for a course she had initiated. This program includes instructional materials, student worksheets, and individual fifteen-minute class plans for each grade for every day of the school year.

The principal objective of the course, listed in the statement of purpose, is to help students feel good about themselves. Allred's course is intended to help students to explore and define their self-concepts, to build on their strong points, and to deal with life's experiences in a positive way.

Although helping students feel good about themselves is considered the primary objective in the course, Allred obviously cares about more than this. She wants children to develop qualities that will justify their feeling good about themselves.

The first chapter, on positive physical and intellectual actions for a healthy self-concept, includes a section on good table manners and explains their importance. Sections discuss exercise, rest, and dental hygiene: "Teeth, those shiny things so important to you, are something you own and will have for the rest of your life." The undesirability of drug abuse is explained, and the intellectual needs for information, creative thinking, problem-solving, and memory improvement are touched upon.

The second chapter gives advice on managing time, possessions, money, and energy. It suggests ways of identifying and managing thoughts and such feelings as anger, worry, jealousy, pride, fear, loneliness, and discouragement. It even explains why being thankful is a virtue.

A chapter on getting along with others invites students to help develop a

class code of conduct, based on how they want to be treated by others. It stresses the importance of smiling at others and being friendly, having empathy and seeing the good in others, encouraging them, and helping other people to feel good about themselves. One of the exercises has students relate their experiences of encouraging others or showing appreciation.

A chapter on honesty focuses attention on the importance of self-awareness, being honest with yourself, being realistic, and recognizing your strengths and weaknesses. The folly of making excuses and blaming others also is pointed out.

Chapter 5, on continual self-improvement, begins with the question, "What is the largest room in the world?" The answer is, the room for improvement. But the more you improve, the better you will feel about yourself, the course teaches. The virtues of courage, persistence, and transforming problems into opportunities are explained. Self-improvement here extends to all aspects of the person: physical, intellectual, and emotional.

Emotional self-improvement is the area most closely related to moral improvement. Students are urged to be more cheerful, to say good things about others, and to treat others as they would like to be treated. Cooldown exercises are given for bringing such emotions as anger or anxiety under control.

The exercises included in the Positive Action kit are engaging. Some invite class discussion to promote understanding of the concepts being considered. One exercise on "refusing to abuse" has students draw pictures of a person doing something harmful to his or her body or using too much of something good.

Another worksheet consists of a Mother Goose board game for the children to play. If you land on the square, "Thanked mom for dinner," you get another turn. "No smile," you lose a turn. And, "Told a friend something bad about another," you go back two squares.

One exercise, called My Talent Search, asks students to list talents they are or would like to be developing. They also are asked to list and draw pictures of things they like to do with friends and things they enjoy doing alone. A worksheet on friends asks students to explain why they picked a certain person as a friend and what they do and do not like about that friend; the goal is to increase awareness of factors that might increase one's chances of gaining new friends.

Those who worry that an emphasis on self-esteem will create students who are unrealistic, self-centered, and complacent should have their fears at least partially allayed by the content of Allred's course. As we have seen, she emphatically stresses the importance of honest and realistic self-assessment, good manners and consideration for others, hard work, and continual self-improvement.

Still, the natural order of values may be inverted when feeling good about oneself or getting appreciation from others is given priority over the importance of the achievements themselves. In the introduction to one of her

exercises on success, Allred writes, "Let your talents speed you to a good self-concept. Each of us can develop a skill, talent, or personal quality to bring us pleasure or satisfaction and the appreciation of others. These things help build our self-esteem."

The importance of being appreciated and of feeling good about oneself should not be underestimated. But neither should they be considered the primary reason for doing one's schoolwork. Rather, they are best viewed as being valuable byproducts, not the principal aim, of doing things that are worthwhile. Furthermore, students who see the intrinsic worth of things will not rely on the approval and appreciation of others to determine what is right or wrong and what is worth pursuing.

Ann Merek, a counselor who has been involved in implementing the Positive Action program in Corvallis, reports that the response has been favorable. Teachers generally feel positive about it, and parents report that children are bringing useful concepts home and are better able to discuss problems with them. Younger children, however, appear to be more receptive to the program than older children.

Merek feels that it is crucial for young children to develop a positive self-concept. "Elementary is the level to help these students. When kids feel good about themselves, they can find more satisfying options and go within themselves rather than submitting to peer pressure." Concern about substance abuse and suicide were among the reasons for implementing this program to raise student self-esteem.

Conclusion

Programs to enhance student self-esteem generally consist of two components. First, an effort is made to ensure that students feel they are noticed and liked and that people care about them. Second, students are helped to identify and develop their unique talents, and strong reinforcement is made readily available in the form of public recognition and displays of student work.

If there is a danger that emphasis on feeling good about oneself might lead students to become unrealistic, self-centered, or complacent, teachers appear to be taking measures to guard against this undesirable consequence. They do not simply encourage feeling good about oneself. They also stress the importance of ongoing self-improvement, having an honest and accurate self-image, accepting responsibility, and respecting the worth and rights of others.

Nothing in the methods surveyed appears to conflict with recent studies indicating that self-esteem is an effect rather than a cause of achievement. Students are clearly given the message that actual self-improvement is the surest route to feeling better about themselves. They are encouraged to be the best people that they can be, fully developing their virtues and their abilities.

Chapter 4

Self-Esteem and Study Skills

If self-esteem is important to academic success, one logical place to strengthen it would be in study-skills classes. This is exactly what Ann Fenton does at Rowe Junior High School in Milwaukie, Oregon. Over the years, she has developed a course that is taken by every seventh grader at Rowe.

The first half of the course concentrates on developing self-esteem. On the first day of class, Fenton promises students that they gain more self-understanding, learn how to manage stress, and improve their interpersonal skills. All these are helpful in raising self-esteem.

Self-understanding and good interpersonal relationships are central to high self-esteem, whereas emotional stress often is associated with low self-esteem. Finally, a positive attitude and improved study skills can enhance self-esteem by raising achievement levels.

This chapter describes methods that Fenton uses to help students develop increased self-awareness, a positive attitude, and study skills that will increase their self-esteem.

Increasing Self-Awareness and Self-Understanding

Fenton does several things to increase student self-awareness. First, she has students fill out a twenty-five-item Self-Esteem Evaluation prepared by the United Learning Institute. This exercise provides nonreflective students with a clearer picture of their attitudes, behaviors, values, and feelings, so that they can assess what they like about themselves and what they might want to change.

Students' responses to the evaluation indicate whether they feel confident in their abilities and values. However, the questions are very general and do not indicate which specific abilities students think they possess or what they value in particular.

Fenton also uses a fifty-item questionnaire to measure self-esteem. Items indicating high self-esteem include "I'm pretty sure of myself," "I'm easy to like," and "I'm proud of my schoolwork." Some of the items that reflect low self-esteem are "It's pretty tough to be me," "I'd change a lot of things about

myself if I could," "I often feel upset in school," and "Someone always has to tell me what to do."

Although these exercises begin to expand students' self-awareness, students can also benefit from identifying what specific things upset them in school, and what particular things they would like to change. It also is important for them to discover why they feel and behave as they do.

To promote further self-reflection, Fenton has her students complete a Personal Reflective Thinking worksheet. First, students list in order the five things they value most in life. Second, they identify the happiest person they know and explain why they selected that person. Third, they separately list the qualities that they like the most and the least about themselves.

Next, they list the four people (living or dead) who they most like and respect, again explaining their attractive qualities and what they do. Finally, they write a short essay describing themselves and what they are becoming. These exercises help students to develop deeper self-awareness, identify the things they value most, and provide a foundation for future goal setting.

Instructors sometimes use the following technique to help students to order their values more accurately. Instead of having students rank their preferences intuitively, they ask students to construct a ranking by taking every item on the list and comparing it with every other item on the list, and then tallying the results.

Being forced to make a choice among a variety of things, all of which may be highly valued, can be an agonizing and very self-revealing exercise. It can sometimes come as quite a shock to become aware of the things that influence our decisions and actions.

This type of exercise can be used to clarify preferences in many different areas. It can help us to rank order the things we most like or dislike in ourselves or others, things we most enjoy doing, things we would most want in an occupation or a spouse, and so forth.

Classroom discussions in which students name people they most admire and consider successes and winners can also be revealing. Discussion revolves around what they admire in these people and why they would like to be like them. Teachers who may have had very different idols and role models when they were younger should be aware that today's students may admire radically different qualities. Extreme emphasis on being a "success" or a "winner" also can tend to bias the list. If we admire Socrates, Lincoln, Mother Teresa, and Martin Luther King, is it because they were winners and great successes?

Two other exercises are used by Fenton to promote self-awareness. Students are given a "Who's Who?" sheet on which they paste or draw a picture of themselves and then cut and glue words and pictures from magazines that describe who they are.

Students also are asked to make a personal coat of arms that is divided into five parts. On the coat of arms, students draw pictures of what they do the very best, what they most would like to be better at, what they most like about

others, and what they want to be doing ten years from now. In the fifth section, they write three words they would like people to use in describing them. These exercises are fun and they help students become aware of how they see themselves and of what they would like to become. Fenton tries to get students to see a relationship between who they are and what they like, admire, and desire to become.

The increased self-awareness and self-understanding brought out in these exercises can promote self-esteem in two ways. First, students may recognize that they do have many qualities of which they should be proud. Second, in seeing more clearly what talents they possess, what they value, and what they enjoy, they are in a better position to determine what they want to achieve or become and how to accomplish it. Clarity and confidence of purpose are important components of self-esteem. They also enhance a person's chances of attaining things that will further enhance his or her self-esteem.

Accenting the Positive

A believer in the power of being positive, Fenton gives her students lots of praise, smiles, and even hugs. Her positive attitude causes students to look forward to attending her class. Students are in her class to learn how to become successes and winners. She is enthusiastic about what she is doing, and she expects enthusiastic class participation in return. Usually, she gets it.

Being warm, cheerful, friendly, and enthusiastic, and using words like "fantastic" and "wonderful" is not all there is to being positive. Sometimes it is necessary to correct or discipline students. But even here it is important to do so in a manner that does not reinforce a negative self-image. Instead of calling the student bad, a failure, or a cheat (depending on the situation), Fenton might say, "It really isn't like you to . . . . is it?" When students agree that it isn't like them to do the disapproved thing, rejection of the undesirable behavior is incorporated into their self-image.

If disapproval is directly expressed, it should be in the form, "I am disappointed that you chose to . . . ." This stresses the student's responsibility and should be followed by making sure that he or she is aware of more constructive alternative behavior choices.

One of the ways Fenton keeps things positive is to focus on the process of growing and developing, rather than concentrating on actual or anticipated successes and failures. Students are encouraged to view themselves as a work in progress. They are taught to put forth their best effort and develop their potential as far as possible.

This emphasis on process and personal growth rather on immediate product gives successes an even larger significance. They indicate what else can be done. And failures are considered learning experiences. It is reminiscent of what Socrates once noted—that the loser in an argument gains more than the winner, since he has been corrected and learned something.

Students are encouraged to say "I can" and "I will" rather than the more tentative "I'll try." Students are taught the art of doing affirmations to further strengthen their confidence. Once they have identified what they would like to be and do, they do not simply picture themselves striving in that direction. Instead, they practice visualizing themselves as having arrived, as already being and doing those things. Fenton uses two different exercises to facilitate this.

First, Fenton uses an eighteen-item list called Affirmations for Building Self-Esteem compiled by the United Learning Institute. Constant repetition of these affirmations presumably helps students to adopt and maintain attitudes that usually coexist with high self-esteem. The items listed below show clearly what is being encouraged.

At least four underlying assumptions stand out in this list. The first is that everyone has intrinsic value and is entitled to respect. These things are considered basic human rights, not things that must be earned or can be lost. Second, these rights are universal. Third, effort and the challenge and joy of growth and development are emphasized over what one has actually achieved or attained. Finally, an internal locus of control is encouraged:

- I am a valuable and important person, and I'm worthy of the respect of others.
- No one in the entire world is more or less worthy, more or less important, than I.
- I am warm and friendly toward all I contact; I treat everyone with consideration and respect.
- I feel warm and loving toward myself, for I am a unique and precious being, ever doing the best my awareness permits, ever growing in wisdom and love.
- I count my blessings and rejoice in my growing awareness.
- I'm optimistic about my life; I look forward to and enjoy new challenges to my awareness.
- I am actively in charge of my own life and direct it in constructive channels. My primary responsibility is for my own growth and well-being (the better I feel about myself, the more willing and able I am to help others).
- I am my own expert, and I allow others the same privilege.
- I am my own authority (and I am not affected by negative opinions or attitudes of others).
- I am aware of my value system and confident of the decisions I make based on my current awareness.
- I am an action person; I do first things first and one thing at a time.
- I have a confident expectancy of reaching my goals, and I bounce back quickly from temporary setbacks.
- It is not what happens to me, but how I handle it, that determines my emotional well-being.

Fenton also uses a United Learning Institute list of affirmations that inculcates an attitude of responsibility.

In another widely used affirmation technique students are provided with ten 3 X 5 cards. They select ten areas in which they would most like to succeed or improve and then write a positive statement on each of the cards, acting as if the goals had already been achieved. For example, a student who would like to have more friends might write "I have many friends" or someone who finds math difficult might write "Math is easy for me."

Students then regularly review these cards during quiet moments, perhaps right after they wake up and just before they go to sleep. They try to imagine themselves as they would like to be. The idea behind this exercise is that we become what we think of ourselves as being. Those who feel like successes act like successes and those who act like successes will be successes. Conversely, those who cannot even imagine themselves being or doing a particular thing have little chance of achieving it.

Affirmations can take many forms. Those who need to feel better about themselves sometimes write lists of their good qualities and place them in prominent places around their home. For example, a person might write, "Hi! My name is Sarah. I am a cheerful, friendly and considerate person. I am honest and trustworthy. I am good in math and science, and I can bake a cherry pie." Or, one might paste up goals as reminders: "I am a nonsmoker" or "I exercise every morning."

Study Skills for Self-Esteem

The first half of Fenton's course allows students to clarify who they are, what their abilities and competence levels are, and what they want. They set goals and priorities and build enthusiasm and positive attitudes. Now they are ready to acquire study strategies and skills that will facilitate achieving things that will further raise their self-esteem.

Fenton provides students with a handout that explains how to develop a plan of action. It includes formulation of the goal, listing advantages and disadvantages of reaching the goal, what it will cost, sources of help or useful information, possible obstacles and how to handle them, and steps needed to reach the goal. Finally, a followup sheet is used to evaluate what contributed the most or least to the success or failure and to decide how to improve future efforts. Students are encouraged to reward themselves with special treats for their successes.

Students also learn how to take notes, read quickly for desired information, use resource materials, and improve their memories. They learn to manage space and time, discover their hidden agendas, and make time profiles and balanced, flexible schedules.

To increase students' awareness of time, Fenton makes them record how well they stick to their daily schedules. She wants them to learn to take

advantage of small blocks of spare time, such as the five minutes they might spend waiting for a class to start: "These are five precious minutes of your life that will never be here again."

The daily record or schedule does more than increase awareness and efficiency in use of time. It also serves as a reminder of one's goals and rate of progress. It is important for students to keep lists of their goals and to check off accomplishments at the end of each day. "We want to turn students into list-makers," says Fenton.

Finally, Fenton stresses the importance of good habits. It is not enough to know how to study well; students must be able to use that information to establish new study habits. Fenton points out to students that it takes three to six weeks to establish a habit, and nine weeks to break a bad one.

Conclusion

It is particularly satisfying to Fenton to work with kids who have nothing going for them at first, and to get them back on task with smiles and hugs. She wants to turn kids on to learning, succeeding, and being happy. At the same time, she wants them to learn responsibility and know that school is not play.

The basic plan to achieve these goals is to help students discover who they are and what they want, to help them set clear goals and priorities, and to build their self-confidence. Then, help them learn strategies and skills that will help them succeed, making habits of the secrets of success.

Conclusion

The conclusions drawn in this Bulletin fall into three interrelated categories: Questions of values, issues of psychological fact and theory, and observations about how student self-esteem is promoted in classrooms today.

Values

Self-esteem is a feeling that derives from being and doing those things that one considers to be worthwhile. Because academic achievement is not the only area in which students can find their sense of personal worth, it is possible for them to have high self-esteem without having any interest or competence in academic pursuits. This raises serious questions about the advisability of making student self-esteem a top educational priority.

The principal aim of education is not to raise students' self-esteem or to make them feel better about themselves. Our greater concern is for them to become citizens who are worthy of esteem. We want them to become the best that they can be, devoted to those things in life that indeed are most worthwhile.

Those we most admire are not motivated primarily by a desire to feel good about themselves or to enhance their self-esteem. Rather, they are driven by a commitment to and a belief in the value of what they are doing. Furthermore, an achievement cannot raise our self-esteem unless it has a value in our eyes apart from its ability to raise our self-esteem.

The paradox of self-esteem, then, is this: The surest and most direct route to a self-esteem worth having is to forget about self-esteem as a goal in itself and simply to focus on being the best that one can be in the pursuit of those things most worth doing. A corollary of this is that students need to discover for themselves which things are most worthy of their esteem.

Psychological Fact and Theory

Recent studies strongly indicate that self-esteem is an effect, not a cause, of academic achievement. Moreover, many theorists have held that low self-esteem, feelings of inferiority, and desire to improve oneself provide the

primary incentive for greater striving. In this view, students with high self-esteem should be expected to be self-satisfied and complacent. How is this to be reconciled with the widespread belief that raising students' self-esteem is a good way to raise achievement levels?

The view that self-esteem is helpful is based on the following considerations: We know that students with low self-esteem are more inclined to be depressed, and depression can reduce a person's effectiveness both in work and in personal relationships. We also know that students who lack confidence in their values and in their ability to succeed can become demoralized and defeated.

Although these considerations show how self-confidence and self-esteem can indeed enhance chances of success, no theory explains how they can actually cause or provide a motive to achieve. Knowing that one has the ability to do a thing will make it seem safe and reasonable to try if one cares to. But it does not in itself provide any motive to act. The motive for doing one's math assignment, for example, lies in seeing the value of doing that assignment, not simply in knowing that one has the ability to do it.

Hence, high self-esteem does not necessarily lead to academic achievement. On the other hand, because raising one's self-esteem presumably is not the only motive one can have for doing one's work, students with high self-esteem still can be highly motivated to do their work.

Self-esteem, then, can indeed increase chances of success by reducing depression and fear of failure. But it does not do so by providing a motive to succeed. There are two subsidiary conclusions relevant to teaching. First, the best way for students to increase confidence in their abilities is to actually acquire competencies that will justify feeling confident. Second, the best way to motivate students to do their best is to lead them to see for themselves the value of the goals we wish them to pursue.

Practice

A review of the methods used to enhance student self-esteem reveals that these precepts are widely honored in practice, if not always in theory. Schools that make student self-esteem a top priority emphasize the importance of lifelong personal growth, achievement, and skill development as sources of self-satisfaction. Students are not simply encouraged to feel good about themselves. They are recognized and rewarded for effort and achievement not only in academics, but in athletics, the arts, and community service.

Some critics are concerned that encouraging students to feel good about themselves without having to earn their self-esteem will have undesirable effects. The fear is that this will create students who are unrealistic, self-centered, self-satisfied, complacent, incompetent, and ultimately unhappy. In the schools surveyed this was not occurring. Students in these schools are taught to have an accurate self-image, to respect the worth and rights of others,

to develop their competencies, and to find their personal worth in continual growth and development.

In the example of Ann Fenton' self-esteem and study-skills class, we see how self-esteem is encouraged first by promoting increased self-awareness and self-knowledge. Students decide what they really want to be and do, and they set goals and priorities. They build enthusiasm for their potential and confidence in their abilities. And, finally, they learn and commit to habit a variety of skills and strategies that will facilitate greater achievement. Clarity, confidence, and competence lay the foundation for future successes that rightly will enable them to feel better about themselves.

Some psychologists believe that self-talk is another important avenue of self-affirmation. Self-talk can be negative or positive. Those who engage in negative self-talk may constantly chastise themselves for their failures and tell themselves they are sloppy, stupid, incompetent, lazy, and can't do this or that. People who do this should catch themselves and replace such negative self-statements with positive ones.

The way parents and teachers talk to a child influences the image the child will have of himself or herself, and thus will influence how he behaves and what he is willing to attempt. If you call a child a brat, it is very likely he will act like one. If you tell him repeatedly that he is very artistic, he may practice painting and drawing until he excells in these areas.

One last note on positive attitudes is in order. Many self-esteem enhancement classes are characterized by an atmosphere of "can do" enthusiasm, where the teacher serves both as a role model and cheerleader. Much of this enthusiasm is focused on the students themselves as people who can do anything if only they believe they can.

But there is another source of enthusiasm that should not be overlooked. That is the enthusiasm for the material to be learned, which can be fascinating and worthwhile in its own right, opening worlds of wonder, delight, and understanding. And there can be enthusiasm for meeting the challenges of hunger, disease, injustice, strife, and ignorance that our imperfect world so abundantly offers, the challenge of making this a better place to live.

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